

Introduction

Constantine A. Pagedas

“Now the island lies in ruins, it is partially occupied, untold refugees have been created, and the American Ambassador has been killed.”¹ Thus wrote the late Greek American James Pyrros, political aide to Congressman Lucien Nedzi, in his diary as tensions on the island of Cyprus between Greece and Turkey reached their zenith on 19 August 1974. Since then, a political impasse has existed.

Is Cyprus on the cusp of a significant political change in the situation that has existed more or less since the summer of 1974, when the island experienced a Greek-inspired coup followed by two Turkish military offensives that have left it divided?

The summer of 2014 marks the fortieth anniversary of perhaps one of the lowest points in the post-1945 history of the eastern Mediterranean region (see figure 1). During the summer of 1974, a political and military confrontation over the island nation erupted between two North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies—Greece and Turkey—that had direct ramifications for other NATO members, notably, the United States and Great Britain.

Throughout its history, Cyprus has proved to be something of a political enigma. Situated five hundred miles east of Greece and only forty miles south of Turkey, Cyprus’s strategic location made it a prized possession over the centuries for many great powers wanting direct access, by sea and later by air, to the Middle East, North Africa, and beyond. Yet Cyprus’s demographics

1. James G. Pyrros, *The Cyprus File: Washington, DC; A Diary of the Cyprus Crisis in the Summer of 1974* (New York: Pella, 2010), 270. I am grateful to Peter N. Marudas for providing me with a copy of this book.

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Mediterranean Quarterly 25:1 DOI 10.1215/10474552-2420206

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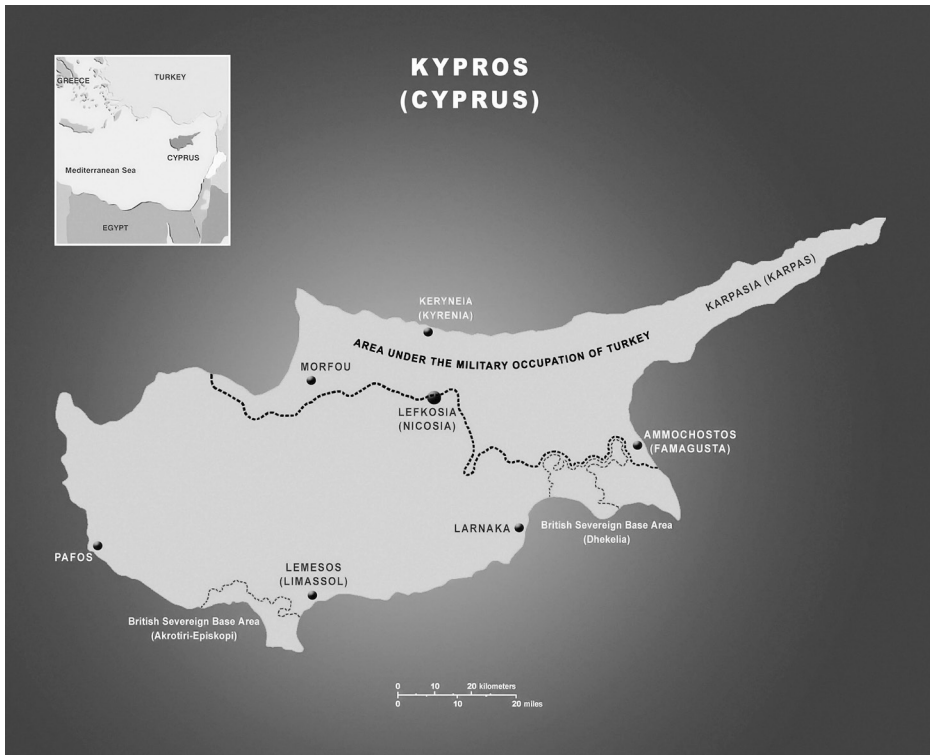


Figure 1. Cyprus as of 2014, the fortieth anniversary of the island’s division.

Source: Image courtesy of the Press and Information Office, Republic of Cyprus. Used with permission.

presented unique challenges. Today, Greek Cypriots make up approximately 77 percent, Turkish Cypriots 18 percent, and others 5 percent of the island’s population, which is estimated at 1.16 million people.² The associated ethnic divisions, along with the relative geographic proportions of the island in which the Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot communities live, have been a source of tension and recrimination for the local population—and, naturally, for Greece and Turkey—since independence in 1960.

The fateful summer of 1974 was not only the beginning of a de facto physical partition of the island but also the culmination of what had become a forty-year domestic struggle between the Greek-Cypriot majority and the

2. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), “Cyprus,” *World Factbook* (Washington, DC: CIA, 2013), www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cy.html, accessed 17 October 2013. The population total is as of July 2013. The ethnic division percentages are as of 2001.

Turkish-Cypriot minority for a more workable political arrangement for Cyprus. The London and Zurich agreements of 1959 and 1960 established the Republic of Cyprus (with the exception of the two military bases of Dhekelia and Akrotiri, which remained under British sovereignty); created a treaty of alliance among Greece, Turkey, and Great Britain for the maintenance of the independence and territorial integrity of Cyprus; and established that the three countries would act as guarantor powers to ensure Cyprus could neither join Greece (*enosis*) nor be partitioned. In the fullness of time, the resulting political environment became the fuel for subsequent confrontations between Athens and Ankara over Cyprus (which in turn drew in Great Britain and the United States) in 1963–64 and in 1967. On these two occasions, Turkey had threatened to intervene militarily in Cyprus as a guarantor power, only to be deterred by the United States. As one author has noted, these were some very tense and “uneasy years” for both Cyprus and for the region as a whole.³ When the 1974 crisis overturned the London-Zurich paradigm for Cyprus, the world witnessed the loss of varying degrees of political credibility among all of the parties to the crisis.

The military dictatorship in Athens had largely been at odds with Nicosia since coming to power in 1967. The Greek military junta, and in particular Brigadier General Demetrios Ioannides, the key ringleader, deeply mistrusted the Cypriot president, Archbishop Makarios. Athens considered him too liberal for the junta’s extreme right-wing tendencies, and Makarios, for his part, ensured relations between Nicosia and Athens would be strained. Consistently refusing to follow Athens’s lead, Makarios strongly criticized the policies of the Greek military dictatorship and resisted entreaties regarding *enosis* with Greece.

In the early morning of 15 July 1974, on the orders of Ioannides, Greece initiated a coup to overthrow Makarios, which led to a series of events from which Cyprus has yet to recover. The coup initially succeeded and briefly saw the strongly pro-Greek nationalist Nikos Sampson assume control of the island with the assistance of Greek officers from the Cyprus National Guard. Although Makarios survived and managed to escape thanks to the British forces on Cyprus, Turkey would not be denied a third time from landing its

3. See Polyvios G. Polyviou, *Cyprus: Conflict and Negotiation, 1960–1980* (London: Duckworth, 1980), 34–61.

troops on the island to protect the Turkish-Cypriot minority, and the invasion began on 20 July 1974. Immediately upon bringing Greece and Turkey to the brink of war, the junta collapsed on 23 July under the weight of the political crisis it had created, as did the junta's puppet leader in Nicosia.

The immediate political ramifications of the 1974 crisis, of course, were not limited to the eastern Mediterranean. Washington saw its credibility in the region severely tarnished because of its inability to mediate among the various parties. Then-secretary of state Henry Kissinger tried to manage the crisis, at first supporting the Greek junta, then switching US support to the Turkish government under the premise that Turkey would withdraw from the island. The opposite occurred, as Turkey initiated a second invasion from 14 to 16 August 1974, culminating with Turkish troops occupying 38 percent of Cyprus's territory. The nadir of Washington's diplomacy, however, came on 19 August 1974, when Greek-Cypriot gunmen killed US ambassador Rodger Davies during a demonstration outside the US embassy in Nicosia. As the historian James Edward Miller has concluded:

The Cyprus crisis was the apogee of Kissinger's blundering. Placing his own determination to hold onto power ahead of US national interest, he blustered, temporized, misused his department, and in the end had nothing to show but the creation of an enormous reservoir of ill will in the United States and in the eastern Mediterranean. By the time of the second Turkish offensive (August 1974), Kissinger and the United States had alienated Greece, Turkey, and both communities in Cyprus.⁴

Over the long term, the 1974 crisis brought a new set of challenges to Cyprus and the region. Although he was eventually restored to power in December 1974, Makarios returned to a divided Cyprus with foreign troops occupying the northern portion of the island—a situation that exists almost forty years later. Perhaps even more difficult to address today are the emotional scars and political prejudices that grew for all of the island's residents from the experiences of the approximately two hundred thousand Greek-

4. James Edward Miller, *The United States and the Making of Modern Greece: History and Power, 1950–1974* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 203. Miller provides perhaps the fairest and most balanced treatment of the US role in the 1974 crisis, especially the role of Kissinger. See 185–200.

Cypriot and forty thousand Turkish-Cypriot refugees who were forced to segregate themselves in the wake of the 1974 crisis. As one expert observed, “By any international standards, the volume of refugees proportional to the total ethnic population was enormous (some 40 percent). This has made the problems of absorption, rehousing and perhaps eventual resettlement correspondingly complex.”⁵

The authors in this special volume of the *Mediterranean Quarterly* bring a diverse set of perspectives as well as unique backgrounds and experiences to their individual pieces, each making informed and reasonable judgments with respect to the issues that have confronted Cyprus and the region over the past forty years. While the events of the summer of 1974 are indeed lamentable, the purpose of this special issue on Cyprus is not to resurrect old prejudices or lay blame for past misdeeds. Certainly, the divided population of Cyprus, and Nicosia itself, the “last divided city in Europe,” is a constant reminder of the time when events were allowed to spin out of control.

Rather, the contributors to this volume have looked at the Cyprus issue in an effort to try to make some sense of the tragedy in today’s world and offer sound conclusions about the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for Cyprus. Ultimately, it is hoped that the latest rounds of negotiations for a political settlement, Cyprus’s recent membership in the European Union, the discovery of offshore natural gas reserves in the Mediterranean, and the development of new partnerships with countries in the region such as Israel—the focus of the essays in this volume—will help Cyprus move beyond the limits of the 1974 status quo and invent a more dynamic and promising future.

5. Roger Zetter, “Rehousing the Greek-Cypriot Refugees from 1974: Dependency, Assimilation, Politicisation,” in John T. A. Koumoulides, ed., *Cyprus in Transition 1960–1985* (London, Tri-graph, 1986), 107.